

A JOHNSONIAN NEWS LETTER

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Edited by James L. Clifford
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa.

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M.L.A. MEETINGS

As those of you who were able to get to New York already know, the M.L.A. meetings, Dec. 27-29, were a great success. Because of travel conditions and war duties, many active members were unavoidably absent; but the attendance in general was quite remarkable.

Wed., Dec. 27, was 18th century day. After the Group VII meeting in the morning, about 60 members (some ably guided through subterranean passages by our scout, Allen Hazen) found their way to the Hotel Martinique, for the special 18th century luncheon. Of course, your editor, as entrepreneur, was overjoyed to see so many on hand.

From others you may get a different story, but we thought the whole affair was most enjoyable. After the luncheon there was an impromptu program; first we heard a few words from E. H. Wright, who has directed so much 18th century research at Columbia; then W.S. Lewis and J. W. Krutch were introduced -- two men who have done so much this year to spread interest in the Age of Johnson, outside academic halls. And there was ample time for introductions and pleasant chat.

Following the luncheon came the regular Group VIII meeting, which, like the one in the morning, was well attended and very interesting. We wish you all could have been with us!

We have been chuckling over a story told us recently by Arthur Christy (Columbia)... It seems that early in the meetings one of the hat-check girls at the Hotel Pennsylvania was heard to remark "I wouldn't go out with a single one of these guys attending this convention."

Late Friday, when the last meeting was over, another of the girls acidly commented "This was the dullest convention ever at this hotel. Not a single one of us girls got a date!"

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NEW GROUP OFFICERS

The following officers were duly elected at the group meetings:

Group VII: The Classical Period: Chairman, Louis Landa (Chicago) - Secretary, James L. Clifford (Lehigh).

Group VIII: Literary Tendencies during the Second Half of the 18th Century: Chairman, Richard L. Greene (Rochester) -- Secretary, Arthur Friedman (Chicago).

A complete list of committees will be given in our next issue.

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NEWS FROM ENGLAND

L.F. Powell writes of his distress at news of the death of Walter Graham. "He was my oldest American friend, and a well-beloved friend too. I find it difficult to realize that I shall never see him again and walk with him through English fields. He was a great companion -- witty and well informed: his wit was never malicious. I never heard him speak an ill word for any body, but always a kindly one.

"He loved his work, which was always in his mind; he spared no pains to do it well and honestly. He loved life, too, and delighted in sharing his enjoyment of it with congenial companions." In another letter Powell adds: "We duly commemorated S. J. on the 13th at Brown's Hotel; there was a very good attendance in spite of a bad fog, which held me up. You

will be amused to hear that when I asked one of the porters where the Johnson Club was meeting he consulted a register and said 'Mr. Johnson's lunch No. 8.'

Powell's only son is now stationed in India.

R. W. Chapman writes that he is busy making a detailed examination of the sale catalogue of Johnson's library. Many allusions in Johnson's letters prompt questions as to the editions which he was using, and the catalogue is something of a tangle.

S.C. Roberts (Cambridge Univ. Press) has kindly sent over a copy of his recent lecture on Samuel Johnson, given as one of the Annual Master-Mind Lectures of the Henriette Hertz Trust of the British Academy. Johnson now takes his place with Aristotle, Buddha, Dante, Shakespeare, Aquinas, Newton, Beethoven, Leonardo, Burke and Gibbon (among others) in the list of great thinkers of the past who have been thus commemorated.

In a recent letter Roberts also tells of giving a lecture on Boswell in Edinburgh. He concludes: "How we go on writing and talking about him!"

We are delighted to receive from J.R. Sutherland a copy of his 1944 Warton Lecture, "Wordsworth and Pope", which we recommend highly to our readers. Sutherland again stresses the fact that the views of poetry held by Wordsworth and Pope are in places quite irreconcilable, but that does not mean that one poet is right and the other wrong. "The moment we judge the poetry of either poet by the standards of the other we are bound to do an injustice."

Until recently Pope has been the one most to suffer, since he has been so universally judged by standards laid down by the Romantics, who were so certain that

they had the final answer. But we will not spoil your enjoyment of this splendid analysis by going on.

Edmund Nicholls, Hon. Sec. of the Society of Coggers (described in our last issue) writes: "It might be of interest to add that on the night of June 17/18 when Dr. Johnson's House was blasted I was here in my flat, just two courts away from the house, talking to an American War Correspondent.

"We decided to go out and have a look at the damage about 5 A.M. on Sunday, June 18. We found Mrs. Rowell in a state of exasperation at the mess which had accumulated. By way of distraction I asked her what she thought the Doctor would have said if he had been alive and experienced this onslaught.

"We agreed his language would have been unprintable (You might offer a competition or prize for the best suggested speech by Johnson in such circumstances!) Immediately, Mrs. Rowell recovered her good humour and remarked 'What extraordinary, cunning and clever folk these Germans are!' That's the English all over -- They can't hate, thoroughly, and have a genius for seeing the other man's point of view, however rotten."

Nicholls concludes with an invitation to any Americans in London to attend a meeting of the Coggers. The Coggers now meet, according to a letter from O. D. Savage, in The Peacock, Maiden Lane, five minutes walk from Charing Cross Railway Station. The time is 6:30 P.M. Saturday.

We suggest that our readers pass on this kind invitation to any male friends stationed near London, or occasionally there.

John Butt writes that he has started to do a little teaching again. He spends a few hours each fortnight away from his post in the Home Office, in tutorial work with Honours Students at Bedford College.

KRUTCH'S SAMUEL JOHNSON

Since your editor has elsewhere in print expressed his opinion of Joseph Wood Krutch's new biography of Dr. Johnson, there is no need for a repetition here. But some of our readers who do not have an opportunity to keep up with many papers may welcome a digest of the comments of the early reviewers.

In general, the work was enthusiastically received by scholars and general readers alike. As a result, the first printing of 15,000 copies was exhausted in a few weeks, and because of the shortage of paper the second printing, also 15,000 copies (nearly half already sold), has only recently become available. The lack of paper in December was the only thing which kept the book from becoming a regular fixture in the weekly lists of best sellers.

With one exception, the New York papers were very complimentary. Orville Prescott, in the daily Times of Nov. 14, obviously starting with a dislike for the "overbearing doctor and his period in literature" (Alas! Poor man!), ended a grudging review with the admission that reading the book had been a duty rather than a pleasure. But Harry Hanson in the World Telegram, and Robert Molloy in the Sun, on the same day, were openly enthusiastic. And George Whicher in the Sunday Herald Tribune for Nov. 19 called it a "masterly biography" and insisted that for "balance and good craftsmanship" it was comparable to Carl Van Doran's Benjamin Franklin.

Howard Mumford Jones, in the Chicago Sun's weekly book section for Nov. 19, was equally complimentary, when he called it "an admirable book", the "best modern life of Samuel Johnson."

Of course, many reviewers could not resist the temptation to discuss the rivalry of Krutch and Boswell. None did it more amusingly than Gerald Johnson in the daily Herald Tribune:

"A modern biographer with the audacity to set up in competition

with James Boswell deserves attention for his nerve, if nothing else; and one who not only meets the champ but actually stays in the ring with him for many rounds deserves not merely attention but respectful, even obsequious attention....

"Joseph Wood Krutch accomplishes the feat. Boswell doesn't suffer a knockout at his hands, but that isn't the point -- the point is that at the end of 599 pages Krutch is still on his feet and going strong. Few, indeed, are the moderns who could stay with the formidable Scot that long."

The reviews in the weekly journals carried on the praise: witness Louis Kronenberger in the Nov. 25 Nation, and Bergen Evans in the Dec. 4 New Republic etc. Evans made a good point:

"The book is avowedly addressed to the general reader, not to the professional Johnsonian, yet literary scholars of all kinds may read it with double profit, delighting in its learning and wit and, at the same time, recognizing it as an example of the sort of end toward which all of their efforts should be valued but as means."

Characteristically, Time for Nov. 20 merely quoted some of the most startling anecdotes about Johnson; and Edmund Wilson in the New Yorker for Nov. 18, while admitting the excellence of the book, spent much of his review in attacking the academic tradition. This review, by the way, should be read by all our readers as a most amusing example of the age-old warfare between the wits and the scholars--Boyle vs. Bentley, the Scriblerus wits vs. the research antiquarians. It is also an example of the way the wit refuses to be bound by such things as logic or consistency. This is Krutch's best book, Wilson insists, but at the same time Krutch is being ruined by his present professorial connections!

Several references to Samuel Johnson, which your editor might otherwise have missed, have been kindly supplied him by the publishers. For example, Samuel Sillen in

the Nov. 17 Daily Worker, as might have been expected, was openly hostile. His headline superbly gave away his attitude: "Joseph Wood Krutch resurrects Samuel Johnson -- to no avail." Without Boswell and Macaulay, Sillen insisted, Johnson "would be just about the deadiest duck in the literary gallery." Indeed, "Johnson remains for me a crotchety, stubborn, egotistical tory. His brilliant quips strike me as either dull or cruelly malicious, his philosophy as pedestrian, his writing ponderously uninspired."

In closing he called "Johnson slightly repulsive as a person," and "Krutch's urbane detachment puzzling, even a little irritating."

A startling comparison was made by Elsa Maxwell in her column "Party Line" in the New York Post for Dec. 8. After describing her pleasure in reading the new book, she added "thinking as I read what a striking counterpart of Johnson we have today in that old curmudgeon, Harold Ickes. Not Physically, of course, because Mr. Ickes' acidity seems to keep his weight down, while Sam Johnson's sharp wit emerged from fleshy jowl and a body which belied the poverty he endured."

The columnist then made the even more remarkable suggestion that Westbrook Pegler might "assure himself of immortality" by becoming Ickes' Boswell!

There have been many other references in the public prints, including Christopher Morley's fine estimate in the Book-of-the-Month-Club News, but we do not have space to mention them here.

In general, the comments of the Johnsonian specialists are yet to come. But we do have one highly favorable review (which we assume you all have read) in the SRL for Dec. 2 by Charles Bennett, who certainly knows as much about Boswell and his circle as any man alive.

We trust you have not been bored by this summary of critical opinion about a book which is introducing Johnson to more new readers.

than any volume in recent years. We lay ourselves open to the charge of favoritism; but then, what is an editor to write about if not his own enthusiasms?

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BOSWELL CLUB OF CHICAGO

Some details about the Boswell Club of Chicago are contained in an account in the Chicago Daily News for April 27, 1944, which your editor lately chanced to see. The founder is Jean Jacques Rousseau van Voorhies, the Chicago representative of MacMillan Publishers.

Organized in August, 1942, the club meets once a month, usually at the Union League Club. Each member has assumed the name of one of the original members of Johnson's Club, and a monthly feature is the appearance of a member in theatrical costume, in the role of an actual associate of Boswell.

As the writer in the Daily News puts it, the most recent "brainstorm" of van Voorhies is the creation of a new branch of the club to be known as the Boswell Institute. The purpose of the Institute, the founder is quoted as saying, "will be to conduct research in the field of frustration. It plans properly to award honorary degrees to individuals who have experienced the highest degree of frustration in their business, professional, personal or public life.... The subject of frustration is one that was dear to our great patron, James Boswell... It was also a continual problem of the Great Cham, our illustrious Sam Johnson."

The Institute has accordingly so far granted a number of "F.D." degrees, but your editor still remains uncertain about the names of those receiving the degrees and their qualifications. In these days we suspect many will feel qualified for the honor. What about it? Do any of you wish to apply? And won't someone send us more information about the society?

AN ANNOUNCEMENT

Arthur Friedman and Louis Landa (Chicago) have begun work on a project which will someday be of immense value to all of us. It is a bibliography of 18th century scholarly studies covering the period 1900-1950. They expect to use the present annual bibliography as a model, with whatever readjustments seem desirable.

The work will come out in two parts, the first part to appear -- they hope -- in 1946, including titles of scholarly works from 1900 to 1925. This will make available the scholarship of the first part of the century up to the beginnings of the annual bibliography in PQ; then, sometime around 1951, they propose to make available in one handy volume what the annual bibliography has done year by year for the period 1926 to 1950.

There is still much to be decided, and we are sure that Friedman and Landa will welcome suggestions and advice -- particularly on the nettlesome questions of whether it ought to be a critical bibliography, and to what extent it should be selective.

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A QUERY

Robert Halsband (Northwestern) sends in the following: "The last editor of the works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (W. Moy Thomas, 1861) reprinted an essay of hers from a periodical called The Non-sense of Common-Sense (1738). He added a footnote that the paper 'was edited, and probably projected, by the celebrated General Oglethorpe.' (Vol. II, p. 414) No external evidence has turned up to link the General with the paper, and internal evidence points to his not having any connection with it. Yet Thomas was a careful editor; he must have had some basis for his ascription."

Ames Ettinger, the General's biographer, tells your editor that he cannot settle the problem. Do

any of you have evidence about the periodical?

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THE PUZZLER

We have had quite a few comments about Jim Osborn's little teaser included in our last issue. To be sure, Elliott Dobbie (Columbia) was surprised that we should pass on such an "elementary" puzzler; yet others have pointed out that it was not so simple as it seemed.

The answer, of course, is that in England after Sept. 2, 1752, the next day was Sept. 14. As Dougald MacMillan puts it, "The city knight amarrying the impecunious earl's daughter is a very familiar situation; it appeared at Drury Lane almost every night, one might say, but not on Sept. 10, 1752."

But J. R. Moore points out, what your editor had overlooked, that if the wedding took place on the Continent, the date might well be correct. And Charles Bennett has found another flaw in the wording, since the lady's name should have read "Lady Patricia", the title given to the daughters of an earl.

The shift from Old Style to New Style naturally brought many amusing comments in the newspapers. Mrs. George McCue (Colo. College) sends in one sample:

"Mr. Inspector [wrote an anonymous wag in 1752 to 'Sir' John Hill, columnist -- to give him his modern title -- of the Public Advertiser], I write to you with the greatest perplexity, I desire you'll find some way of setting my affair to rights; or I believe I shall run mad...How is all this? I desire to know plainly and truly! I went to bed last night, it was Wednesday Sept. 2, and the first thing I cast my eye upon this morning at the top of your paper, was Thursday Sept. 14. I did not go to bed till between one and two; Have I slept away 11 days in the 7 hours, or how is it? For my part I don't find I'm any more refreshed than after a common night's sleep."

MEMBERS IN SERVICE

Major J. H. Caskey, of the Chemical Warfare School, Edgewood Arsenal, Md., writes: "Last July I became Chief of the Field Service Branch, a job which keeps me very busy.... On or about 1 January I'll become Executive Officer of the School...."

He adds: "Though we keep terrifically busy, I never did more satisfying work than helping to get officers ready for combat here in our training program. Our mortar battalions have been doing a fine job overseas."

Capt. H. T. Swédenberg Jr.'s address is The Adjutant General's Office, Publication Division, 2 E 977, The Pentagon, Wash. 25, D.C.

We were delighted to see Major Dougald MacMillan at the MLA meetings -- one representative, at least, from the Pentagon Bldg.

Phil Gove writes from the Naval Air Station at Pasco, Wash., where he is Station Gunnery Officer: "I sometimes wonder what the 18th Century is going to mean to me after this war is over a few years from now. Though I never see any of the learned journals now, I still read avidly every word of your News Letter; it may be the thread that will draw me back."

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AUCTION SALES

Included in the Clemens Library, sold at the Parke-Bernet Galleries Jan. 8 and 9, were some fine editions of Pope, including the scarce first issue of the Essay on Man; Pope's copy of Chapman's Iliad with two pages of the manuscript translation; his copy of Gay's Trivia, presented to him by the author; and numerous copies of 18th century works in the original boards.

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Worn has just been received of the death of Mrs. Herbert Evans, for many years the hospitable Mistress of Mrs. Piozzi's home, Brynbella. Your editor remembers with emotion his many visits to the lovely Vale of Clwyd, his pleasant days spent in the beautiful old house with its breathtaking views and rambling gardens.

Under the loving care of Mrs. Evans, Brynbella kept its 18th century atmosphere, and the spirit of Hester Lynch Piozzi surely roamed the walks well pleased. For one visiting American, at least, it will never be quite the same.

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RECENT ARTICLES

As before, we list a few recent articles which some of our readers may have missed. For Johnsonians there are F.R. Leavis, "Johnson as Critic" in Scrutiny (Summer, 1944); W. H. Coleman, "The Johnsonian Conversational Formula", Quarterly Review, Oct. 1944; Philip Gove, "Johnson's Copy of Hammond's Elegies", MLQ, Dec. 1944.

Of general interest, there are Robert A. Aubin, "John Auther, Philomusus" The Journal of the Rutgers Univ. Library, Dec. 1944; Ernest Jones, Geoffrey of Monmouth 1640-1800, Univ. of Calif. Publications in English, Vol. 5, No. 3. (This is a study of Geoffrey's reputation in the late 17th and in the 18th century); R.L. Brett, "The Aesthetic Sense and Taste in the Literary Criticism of the Early Eighteenth Century," RES, July, 1944.

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AN APPRECIATION

For help in making arrangements and managing the recent 18th century luncheon at the M.L.A., we wish to express our heartfelt thanks to Flora Marie Handley, Dick Altick, and Allen Hazen.